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# news

from New York State Senate  
Committee on Investigations,  
Taxation, and Government Operations  
Chairman: Senator Roy M. Goodman

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**GOODMAN INVESTIGATION REVEALS SERIOUS PUBLIC HEALTH THREAT:  
ANTIBIOTIC-RESISTANT BACTERIA AND INFECTIONS ACQUIRED IN HOSPITALS  
PLACE LIVES AT RISK**

Thousands of New Yorkers have acquired infections while in the hospital and countless others are at serious risk because of new strains of antibiotic-resistant bacteria in hospitals and in the community at large, according to an investigative report released today by Senator Roy M. Goodman (R,L-Manhattan), Chairman of the State Senate Investigations Committee.

Despite recognition by experts of these critical problems, there has been an inadequate response by the health-care profession, according to the report, which is a product of a seven-month probe by the Investigations Committee staff and a public hearing, including testimony by some of the most highly respected experts in the medical profession.

At a May 1998 public hearing chaired by Senator Goodman, expert witnesses testified that one of the main causes of hospital-acquired infections is a failure by physicians and other hospital staff to observe elementary hygienic precautions, such as washing their hands and changing gloves when moving from patient to patient. They

also testified about the inadequate systems in place for tracking new types of bacterial infections – a crucial step in identifying the course of new diseases and developing new, more effective antibiotics.

Joining Senator Goodman at a news conference today were Nobel Laureate Dr. Joshua Lederberg of Rockefeller University, Dr. Sheldon Blau, a practicing internist, who nearly died after acquiring an antibiotic-resistant infection while hospitalized after heart bypass surgery, and Dr. Willa Appel, president of the Partnership Policy Center of the New York City Partnership.

Senator Goodman said, "The twin menaces of antibiotic-resistant infections and infections acquired in health-care settings are great cause for concern. Antibiotics have saved countless lives, yet their very use has caused bacteria to become resistant to many, and sometimes all, antibiotics.

"Given the dangerous rise in infections acquired in health-care settings and the dramatic increase in the number of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, the medical profession must act with a new sense of urgency to prevent the loss of lives. The health-care industry must ensure that it is doing everything possible – including doing a better job of implementing hygienic standards – and government must play a leadership role in regulating and helping the medical profession in monitoring and combating this crisis."

Dr. Lederberg said, "While exotic diseases like Ebola have captured the imagination of writers and moviemakers, the likelihood of contracting them here is very small. However, antibiotic-resistant strains of common bacteria such as staph aureus are emerging in New York and in the country. The consequences of this inevitable development could return us to the era before antibiotics, when some patients died from blood infections after routine surgery. We have no time to lose in slowing and responding to the emergence of resistant infections and in preventing their spread."

Dr. Willa Appel said, “The New York City Partnership Policy Center and the six major medical centers involved in the New York Antibiotic Resistance Project greatly appreciate the work Senator Goodman is doing to focus public attention on the global problem of drug-resistant infections. The Antibiotic Resistance Project, with the support of the State Health Department, is developing a collaborative monitoring system which will lead the way to better strategies for dealing with this growing threat.”

The Investigations Committee report contained numerous findings, including:

- Patients acquired approximately 1.7 million infections while in American hospitals in 1995 and approximately 88,000 deaths were attributed to such infections.
- Thousands of patients were estimated to have acquired bacterial infections in health-care facilities in the New York City metropolitan area in 1995 and some died as a result. The costs attributable to those infections ran in the hundreds of millions of dollars.
- Infections are often spread within hospitals because of a failure to apply basic infection control techniques, such as washing hands and changing gloves.
- Hospitals do not consistently follow professional guidelines recommending that certain hospital patients with bacterial infections be placed in isolation rooms and subject to special precautions to prevent the spread of infection.
- More antibiotics are being used to treat patients than are needed – leading to increased resistance to antibiotics. These drugs are not only used to treat disease in humans, but also used on plants and animals.

- Patients contribute to the development of drug resistance by not taking antibiotics as directed, especially by discontinuing use of a drug before the completion of the prescribed dosage.
- For a least a decade, the number of bacterial infections that are resistant, not simply to one, but to almost all, antibiotics has been rising dramatically.
- While multi-drug-resistant bacterial infections are found throughout the world, New York City has a particularly high incidence of such infections and is one of the places in the country where such infections first appear.
- In the past, as bacteria became resistant to one antibiotic, ample alternative antibiotics were generally available. However, because of an earlier downturn in pharmaceutical company investment in this area, the development and approval of a new generation of antibiotics will take years.
- Addressing antibiotic resistance requires comprehensive surveillance of resistant infections, including identifying and reporting such infections. However, New York State regulations do not currently require the reporting of all multi-drug-resistant strains of bacterial infections, such as those involving staph aureus and enterococcus.

In response to these findings, the Investigations Committee report contained a number of specific recommendations, including:

- Leaders of all areas of the health-care system – not only those specializing in infectious diseases – must deliver an urgent wake-up call to the health-care community about the rising threat of infection and the steps needed to combat it. Despite other financial pressures, they must devote the

necessary resources – including nursing and other staff – to combating this critical public health threat.

- The State and City Departments of Health should specifically add infections involving multi-drug-resistant strains of bacteria such as staph aureus and enterococcus to the list of diseases that must be reported under State regulation. Doctors, hospitals and laboratories must also be required to share strategies to monitor and prevent the spread of such infections.
- The State and City Departments of Health should improve the reporting requirements for hospital-acquired infections, whether or not resistant to antibiotics.
- State health authorities should reinstate the recently eliminated requirement for an annual review of hospitals' infection control programs by the hospital's chief executive officer, medical director, and director of nursing services.
- State health authorities should issue more specific regulations requiring improved hygienic measures in health care facilities to prevent the spread of infections and should specify simple measures such as hand washing, as well as engineering or technological components where possible.
- State health authorities should require greater use of isolation rooms in hospitals and other health-care facilities for persons with communicable, especially multi-drug-resistant, infections.
- The State Department of Health, along with the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, should emphasize and aggressively enforce the monitoring and prevention of the spread of infections when they inspect hospitals and other health-care facilities.

- State and federal agencies should assist in the development of research and laboratory facilities to address the increase in antibiotic-resistant infections.
- Appropriate agencies should work to identify ways of reducing the use of antibiotics on plants and animals, so as to slow the spread of resistance.
- Pharmaceutical companies and federal authorities should work together to hasten the development of safe new drugs to address resistant bacteria.
- A joint private industry/government public service advertising campaign should be initiated to educate the public about antibiotic resistance, the proper use of antibiotic and vaccines, and the importance of good hygiene in preventing the spread of infections.
- Hospitals and other health-care facilities should make greater use of isolation rooms and procedures for patients with communicable, especially multi-drug-resistant infections.
- Doctors should prescribe antibiotics only when appropriate and should take the time necessary to educate patients about the proper their proper use.
- Hospitals and other health care facilities should educate patients, families and visitors about hygienic precautions to prevent the spread of infections.

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